



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

4600 Giant Springs Rd.
Great Falls, MT 59405
(406) 454-5840

March 10, 2015

Dear Interested Party:

This letter serves as notification that I have made a decision regarding Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) implementation of two grazing lease renewals on the Ear Mountain Wildlife Management Area (EMWMA) in cooperation with the Gollehon Ranch and Salmond Ranch Co. My decision is to move forward with the proposed action. The 960-acre and 2,120-acre grazing leases will allow for cattle grazing to be used as a management tool to help maintain plant productivity by stimulating regrowth and palatability of native grasses and forbs for the benefit of wildlife on the EMWMA as described in the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA).

No public comments were received on the Draft Environmental Analysis (EA) during the public comment period and subsequently, no modifications have been made to the Draft EA. Please consider the previous copy of the EA along with the stipulations of the Decision Notice as final.

It is my recommendation to move forward with the two proposed grazing lease renewals on the EMWMA. The final decision will be made at the Fish and Wildlife Commission Meeting, April 15, 2015.

Thank you for your interest and involvement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gary Bertellotti". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gary" being more prominent than the last name "Bertellotti".

Gary Bertellotti
Region 4 Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks
4600 Giant Springs Rd.
Great Falls, MT 59405
(406) 454-5840
gbertellotti@mt.gov



**DECISION NOTICE for the Draft Environmental Assessment:
Ear Mountain WMA Grazing Lease Renewal – Gollehon and Salmond Ranches**

Region 4 Headquarters
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to renew two grazing leases on the Ear Mountain Wildlife Management Area (EMWMA) for cattle grazing to help maintain plant productivity by stimulating regrowth and palatability of native grasses and forbs for the benefit of wildlife to adjacent landowners (lessee's) Wayne Gollehon and Salmond Ranch Co. for a 3-year period.

MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT AND PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS

Fish, Wildlife & Parks is required to assess impacts to the human and physical environment under the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). The Ear Mountain Wildlife Management Area grazing lease renewal proposal and its effects were documented by FWP in an Environmental Assessment. A 35-day public comment period ran from January 26 through March 2, 2015. Public notices of the draft Environmental Assessment were placed on the FWP web site and were announced in a news release to the area and statewide newspaper outlets. Hard copies were available at the FWP Region 4 office in Great Falls, and were offered via mail upon request.

ALTERNATIVE TO PROPOSED ACTION:

Alternative A: No Action

- Fish, Wildlife & Parks would not utilize the proposed grazing management plan on EMWMA. Over time, forage quality for big game species will decline.
- The lessee's would be required to find additional grazing pasture elsewhere.
- Hunting access on the lessee's properties may not be available to the public.

Alternative B: Proposed Action

- Fish, Wildlife & Parks would implement the described 3-year rest/rotation grazing cycle on the WMA.
- The establishment and maintenance of the proposed grazing plan would continue to use cattle grazing as a management tool to maintain plant productivity by stimulating regrowth and palatability of native grasses and forbs for the benefit of wildlife.
- The lessee(s) would benefit from the availability of additional early and late summer pasture for their cattle. A cooperative grazing system would promote and continue good relations with local ranchers/neighbors.
- Some segments of the public may disapprove of cattle grazing on EMWMA.
- Public hunting opportunity would be allowed through the Salmond and Gollehon properties via permission and first come, first serve basis.

If the No Action alternative is chosen, FWP would continue to manage EMWMA for the benefit of wildlife species and for public access. Current services and maintenance of EMWMA would continue. No impacts to environmental or human resources would be expected to occur as a result of livestock grazing given that the area wouldn't be grazed by livestock.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

The draft EA was available for public comment from January 26 - March 2, 2015. Solicitation of public input resulted in receipt of zero (0) comments.

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comments were received.

STIPULATION OF THIS RECORD OF DECISION DOCUMENT

None.

MODIFICATIONS TO ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

No modifications to the EA are recommended.

DECISION NOTICE

Utilizing the Environmental Analysis and public comment, a decision must be rendered by FWP that addresses the interests and issues identified for this proposed action. Fish, Wildlife & Parks' analysis supports the agricultural grazing lease of EMWMA as proposed. I find there to be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. **It is my decision to accept the draft EA as supplemented by this Decision Notice as final, and to recommend the implementation of the agricultural grazing leases for EMWMA with Gollehon and Salmond Ranches for a 3-year period.**

The Final EA may be obtained on the FWP website at <http://fwp.mt.gov> or upon request from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Freezout Lake Office, Attn: Brent Lonner, PO Box 488, Fairfield, MT 59436, (406) 467-2488.

Signed,



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